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AUTHOR Harbin, Calvin E.
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ABSTRACT

A college administrator shares his views on how language teachers should develop and expand their teaching competencies. This article is intended to help language teachers become more aware of their potential role in making education more meaningful for the student. The author introduces his paper with a critical examination of "in-words" currently in vogue, deploring "bandwagon" movements in education which are often counterproductive. (RL)

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TEACHING POWER--COMPETENCIES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS

by Dr. Calvin E. Harbin
Dean of the Faculty of Education
Fort Hays Kansas State College, Hays, Kansas

Doctor Kuchar and Members of the Kansas Foreign Language Association:

Teaching on all levels, and wherever found, is essentially the same--helping other people learn. But before people learn, they have to want to learn. And as you know, much good learning occurs at home with parents, siblings, and friends on a more or less informal, individual basis. Essentially, teaching in its broader aspects is a firm responsibility of parents, religious leaders, medical personnel, legal specialists along with parents who are primarily responsible and all in teaching postures so far as our young people are concerned.

But something is going wrong with our teaching of modern languages in the public schools. Not only is there a decline in language study, but the power and influence of language teachers is surely at a low ebb at this point in history. Let's be intellectually honest with each other as we level our concerted attention on this subject of so great importance to you and me this afternoon. It was President Eisenhower who said that if a matter was urgent it wasn't very important, and if it was really important, it couldn't be very urgent--or words to that effect. I hold that the problem we are discussing this afternoon is both important and urgent in its impact on our profession and the nation.

But now I must tell you in all modesty that I am somewhat nervous in speaking out before you, an audience of highly educated specialists in the teaching of languages. Why? Well, I am not a language teacher, nor very proficient in any language, including English. A friend who was recently invited to speak to a group as a consultant likewise protested by saying that his hearers would be real specialists and experts who really knew what they were doing and that he actually felt ill at ease in addressing them. "Oh," said the president of the group, "we have plenty of people in our organization who know what they are talking about. But we still want you to speak to us!"

Now that you understand that I pose as no specialist in your discipline, but only as an interested observer and a general leader in the great profession of which we are all equally a part, I am ready, and even eager to share with you my concerns about teaching power in your field.

Surely, the whole world is reeling from the shocking problems of government. Our cities are decaying, crime is rampant, pollution is

everywhere, houses and buildings in our metropolitan centers are falling down, and our most cherished institutions are said to be failing. In the face of such circumstances, why worry about the teaching of the languages? Well, for me, the above thumbnail description of the predicament society is in is far too gloomy. But even so, we must still order our priorities aright. And we must face our problems realistically. I am puzzled with the ostrich like behavior of some of our leaders who apparently hold that by changing labels, withholding publicity, and other similar tactics, our worst issues will somehow right themselves. Let me give you a few examples of what I mean. Undertakers are said to be employing "grief counselors." People out of work are "plotting a career strategy." When corporate projects cost more than the budget allowed, the situation is referred to as "sub-optimal cost profiles." Stealing is what a thief would describe as "anticipatory communism." One official, caught in a lie, said that his story was "potentially factual."

Recently, I sat in on a high level discussion of the so-called melting pot theory and concept. It was described as a beautiful dream which, while potentially factual and pregnant with suggestions for progress, was nevertheless quite destructive and negative in its totality. This reminds me of an old, old rule of education: "Anytime things appear to be going better, you have overlooked something." Surely America overlooked something in its homes and schools by ever trying to implement the melting pot theory. The consequences are surely part of the cause of Modern Language teachers being somewhat mistreated as I believe them to be in these days.

I am sure that you realize that we have a large segment of the population whose basic philosophy runs something like this:

> The country is fine, schools are OK, the American system of education is good. The trouble is with the blamed kids. They are rotten. Spoiled. No ambition, no ideals!

They oftentimes add something about the lifestyles of our day in particular, the mini-skirts or long hair. My rejoinder to such thinking is to remind them that what is under the hair is far more important than the length of a fellow's hair.

We've got a real problem on our hands in American education. Take for instance, some of the "IN-WORDS" and terms on the national scene. No longer can we simply refer to objectives and be understood. We must designate the particular type and the list is lengthening. There are mountainous commentaries on them. I know of several of them such as affective, behavioral, cognitive, enabling, instructional, and terminal. Surely there are many others to worry about. Then career education is being emphasized greatly these days. One federal official responsible in this area admits he can't define it but adds that he is 100% for it but 150% against trying to define it. Then accountability in education is coming to the front. There are said to be eleven accountability models already and no doubt the list is growing. Basically, this word simply means the responsibility of educators to account in measurable

terms for the effectiveness of their programs. This includes the language teachers of America. Note the names of some of these so-called models: Community involvement; technical assistance; needs assessment; change strategies; project or program management systems; performance objectives; performance budgeting; performance contracting--a type of piece-work plan; staff development; comprehensive evaluation; and program auditing. Does that inspire you or frighten you as it does me?

But I must get on with my views relating to the teaching of modern languages. But before I leave the subject of the newer emphases in education, I must mention--without comment--though I am really seething within about them--the new interest in multi-cultural education or cultural pluralism, bi-lingual education, educational reform and/or educational renewal (there is a vast difference), and last but not least, the highly advertised attention to performance based education sometimes called competency-based instruction. Now there is a real subject for your attention.

What is the age-old problem in education? Is it not that pupils are not learning? Usually, this is because they are not taught! But you say that we have an ample supply of foreign language instructors ready and willing. Indeed we do! Then what is wrong?

Let me review briefly for you the well-intentioned but often misled opponents of public education. Let's see if there is a clue to our problem from the causal factor angle. Who are the real opponents of public education and what is their beef? I shall have to identify by category in our society and I hope that you will understand my reasons for being so general in this respect. Believe me there are inherent dangers for being so foolish as to come right out and naming of names. So we will be content today by merely indicating to you the source of the negative opposition to our schools moving rapidly ahead. Here is my analysis:

Source	Basis
Far right	Costs and results
Far left	Philosophical disagreements
Students	Questioning relevancy and value
Teachers	Refusing to subsidize education
Fed. Government	Withdrawing massive support
State Government	Reluctance to support to the level recommended by profession

As I understand it, the case for the modern languages, or as you prefer to call them--the foreign languages--can be summed up in a few brief points, each worthy of a book in itself. For as you know, foreign languages can have enormous productiveness for an individual as a tool of powerful achievement in many if not most callings. My points really relate to <u>where</u> and bring into focus where the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and appreciations learned in your courses will be used effectively. They are:

1. The requirements of business and industry
2. The requirements of government
3. The requirements of the military
4. The requirements of the teaching profession
5. The requirements of world travelers
6. The requirements of researchers in all professions
7. The requirements of balanced education for all people.

And I would sum up the entire list by asserting that the legitimate literary needs of the American people embrace foreign languages.

Now what about the case <u>against</u> the foreign languages as currently offered? These are my own words and reflect but generally my thoughts and concerns of our educational predicament. First, the languages appear to have a very low priority in both secondary and higher education with several others ranking them and lording it over them in terms of budgets, personnel, and the other facts of life in education. I think that the average student gets too little instruction in the languages, and that it usually comes too late to do much good as judged by the product and usable competencies in the period of post formal schooling. And I must note that many who study languages report that it was costly in terms of whatever else they had to give up in order to complete the requirements for graduation. One college professor swears that he never learned to type because of his learning of languages but now would gladly trade his language proficiency for the ability to type. And I would add that we have had some rather useless false leads such as the ill-fated Esperanto movement which apparently hasn't been heard from lately. Do any of you know what its status is, now?

The basic competencies of foreign language teachers are five in number. They start with understandings of language, proceed on to development of skills related to using it, and include the attitudes and appreciations as concomitant outcomes of language mastery. These all relate to the learning of the language by the individual. The most important competency for a teacher beyond these four is not only more advanced and based upon these four but it is a new ability--the ability to teach others what the teacher has learned. For it is truly said that one cannot teach what he has not learned.

Forty years of experience convinces me that the teacher and the taught jointly engage in a four step process of teaching-learning. The first step is the introduction and attack with heavy emphasis on the work of the teacher. The second calls for work and study on the part of the student, primarily. The next phase calls for joint responsibility for discussion and integration of the subject matter. The last step leading up to application and economic usage of that which was learned is usually described as the evaluation and reporting phase.

I would like to share with you at this time some of the concepts which are included in my recent book on Teaching Power which I would apply to the power of a foreign language teacher on any level today. There must be dozens of these but I should like to point out only a few by way of example of what competencies a modern language teacher could

and should develop for effectiveness in teaching. The points are not in the priority of importance as in my thinking they have equal significance for both teacher and student of the languages.

1. The teacher can and should select competency goals for students. (Several lists are available. See PMLA, Vol. LXXVII, No. 4, Part 2, pp. 31-37 for one list.)
2. Maintain relevancy toward the selected competency goals.
3. Heighten the interest of learners in language.
4. Reduce time necessary for learning (tips, ideas, short-cuts).
5. Provide genuine inspiration to students.
6. Trouble-shoot for students with problems.
7. Encourage student seriousness and application.
8. Map strategy for competency development with alternates and options for students who need them.
9. Point out opportunities for learners of languages.
10. Help the student build a desire and the necessary skills to go on with his language after he leaves school. (I would say that this service to the student--getting him to know how to go on and wanting to go on--is a most important competency of a foreign language teacher. This contemplates the "start but do not finish" idea so necessary in teaching almost anything these days.)

For those of you who are wondering at this time what my personal stance is on the teaching of languages, let me tell you that I believe in mastery of modern language with all my heart. You see I have traveled to Europe seven times without a good working knowledge of a single modern language. I had to stumble, halt, and be dependent on others in a handicapped sort of way which was not at all pleasant. I regretted on many occasions my ignorance and I am happy to tell you that my two children who have graduated from college have excellent language backgrounds in Latin and in Spanish. Both have studied at other universities where they had wonderful contacts with native speakers, and in my opinion, they made great gains even in the summer while traveling in the Southwest, Mexico, and in various European countries. I am just one of the 100 million Americans who are hungry and thirsty to learn a foreign language and learn it properly! How I wish my teachers and the school had made foreign languages attractive and related these courses to future needs, careers, travel, and real life problems when I was struggling to prepare myself for a life of work!

In our beloved land of the free and home of the brave, I often reflect on the dozens if not scores of cultures represented. Not being an advocate of the melting pot concept, I rather believe it would behoove us to capitalize on diversity in cultures and encourage the preservation of divergent values, languages, customs, and the colorful collection of life-styles of an otherwise united people.

If you are at all curious about my perceptions relative to the teaching of the foreign languages, let me share them with you. I am not ashamed of them. I am often wrong but never in doubt, but in this situation I think I am right--dead right. Here they are:

1. If there ever was a branch of knowledge and a part of education needed in the nation's service, it is the foreign languages. I have no doubt about this. Just as it is now, has been, and probably always will be, foreign languages make invaluable contributions to our national existence. Why, oh why, then, must the teaching of languages always have a dismal present but a bright future?

2. Foreign language teachers are usually underpaid for their services in the public and private schools. This is not generally so in proprietary schools of which this nation boasts of having 35,000 many of which are in the field of language instruction.

3. Foreign languages are not usually required any more for graduation from high school or college. There always seems to be a way around any regulation.

4. The value of foreign language in the education of prospective leaders is significant and important, providing, of course, that the quality and quantity sufficient for ordinary usage are built in.

5. Concerning foreign language, the person who knows his history of education cannot be pessimistic. Realistic, perhaps, but not pessimistic. The circles, cycles, fluctuations, bandwagons, new labels, return to former practices, etc. bid us wait. Better days are surely ahead when the insights and wisdom of our educational leaders are heeded by community leaders.

6. There are millions of Americans who feel the need for learning in this area and who would gladly at this late date undertake the study of a language.

7. I do not understand why the National Education Association's Department of Foreign Languages is inactive and apparently has been for five years. (See p. 356 of the 1973 NEA Handbook).

But I must close. It is getting late and you have much on your program this afternoon before your adjournment.

I beg of you foreign language teachers of Kansas to be not discouraged. Your future is now. But for goodness sake, do what you are going to do in upgrading the teaching of languages so that it can take its rightful place in our honorable profession.

I see several imperatives for you based on my careful observations of the teaching process. First, I think student involvement in class planning and operation would pay rich dividends. Second, I would hope you can work out student options for individuals in your classes so as to more effectively manage the behavior and performance of your students. Third, a more favorable classroom climate might go a long way toward attracting huge increases in class enrollment. Fourth, a very convincing argument for the learning and use of languages should come directly from you to all your prospective pupils even before they elect to enroll in

your class. To await the first day of class is to be too late. And last, your immediate attention to the identification of specific competencies of your own and those proposed for your students would go a long way toward strengthening your future position in the faculty family and in administrative councils. I am convinced that foreign language teachers should not look to administrators to solve their professional or teaching problems. Why should someone else persuade students to take foreign languages? I would hope that you, and each of you would become not hostile, but overtly active in enhancing the teaching of modern languages and the upgrading of this association, both collectively and as individual members thereof.

The Distinguished Award for Teacher Education in 1973 was given to the University of New York at Cortland, New York a few days ago for a project which has gained world-wide attention. I want to list the eight distinguishing characteristics of their experimental program for you to give you perhaps some of the things you might consider doing as an Association and as back-home faculty groups. First, the instruction was said to be community centered. Is your teaching that way? It was called a practicum. Is yours? Third, it was performance-based. What about yours? Then it was said to be inter-disciplinary. Can you arrange that? It was generative. This meant, I was told, that tangible projects were spawned from it and all manner of interesting ideas were generated from the instruction. Then they used team teaching. Is this possible with you? The last two characteristics were very interesting. It was said to be open-ended and self-renewing. Can you say that about your teaching? And last, the nature of the instruction and learning was said to be "Open to Change" and revision. I know that language instruction has changed much in the past generation. Are more changes in order?

It has been a privilege to be with you this afternoon, and I wish you well in your proceedings today. Especially, I hope that you have a good year and that you return language teaching to its proper place in the hierarchy of our profession and in the councils of our state.

(There were questions from the floor.)